ORIGIN/ACTION
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ARA	EUR	FE
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NEA	CU	INR
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AGR	COM	FRB
INT	LAB	TAR
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ARMY	CIA	NAVY
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OSD	USIA	NSA
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No action taken
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

U-France

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NEA

FROM : American Embassy Paris DATE: April 2, 1964

SUBJECT : France and the Near East

REF : CA-8895 of March 4, 1964

Very windy and Superficial

The French Government's political intentions in the Arab World have recently been the subject of extensive press attention and the speculation of observers on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. Public interest in French policy towards the Arab states is fed by the French Government's desire to pursue "independent" policies, the resumption of formal diplomatic relations between Paris and the Arab capitals following the end of the Algerian War, and the opportunity of playing France off against her NATO partners. This opportunity is being perceived in various Arab capitals and has already led to probes apparently designed to explore these possibilities in terms of the potential advantages which might be derived therefrom.

There is little doubt that General de Gaulle seeks to enhance French influence in the Arab East as elsewhere in the world, now that the Algerian mortgage has been lifted from French shoulders. It seems reasonable to suppose that French efforts in this undertaking will increasingly be directed towards the key countries of the area and particularly those in which a residue of traditional French influence may be exploited. While much is made of the need for a choice between Arabs and Israelis, it is difficult at first glance to discern advantages of sufficient scope which the Arab states could offer France to induce Paris to forego the leverage which its existing relationship with Israel provides. Accordingly, while speculation on an eventual loosening of the bonds between France and Israel in favor of the renewed connection between Paris and the Arab capitals is intense, we have no reason to believe that the French Government feels compelled to

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restrict or sacrifice its relations with Israel in favor of its resurgent contacts with the Arab World. This also continues to be the line of the French Foreign Office although the Quai quite naturally rejoices in the dawning of a new era in which France may once more pursue her interests with both camps. On the other hand, observing the efforts made by Israel's representatives and friends in Paris, it is plain that the Government of Israel is concerned at the potential effects of the new options thus opening before French policy makers.

France's moves in the Near East since the resumption of official relations have so far been more noteworthy by their number than by their consequences. De Gaulle's visit to Iran led to aid offers which proved to be disappointing to the Iranians. Hussein's "private visit" here last September has not yet produced visible signs of French favor and while French Parliamentary Missions have entered upon junkets to the Middle East, the outcome of their visits is still obscure.

Although France's largesse to the Arab States has thus failed to materialize as yet, high expectations in the Fertile Crescent have created a climate which, seen from here, seem extraodinarily warm and favorable to France. This has not escaped the attention of the Quai's experts who, while rejoicing in the unaccustomed glow, are concerned lest the bill be presented too soon knowing full well the economic limitations which powerfully inhibit the ability of French leaders fully to exploit existing needs and dissatisfactions in the Arab Orient. For us, it may be well to bear in mind that in such a climate the French need not greatly exert themselves to generate the pro-French ambiance which has frequently been such a striking feature of, say, the Lebanese scene.

However, some signs do point to further French initiatives. The Department is aware of the unconfirmed reports of yet another Presidential trip this Spring or possibly next year. A [redacted] officer has informed us that unspecified Elysée advance men (said to be unknown even to the Quai) have gone to test the climate in various Mid-Eastern capitals allegedly including at least Cairo and Beirut as well as Damascus (the latter on an "if possible" basis). That these soundings coincide with the opening of a period of stress in US-UAR relations and Chairman Khrushchev's published plans to attend the Aswan ceremonies next May, has given prognosticators here still further food for thought. A Nasser visit to Paris

to discuss

to discuss a Mediterranean Pact is also rumored.

To date, the French Government has followed Quai advice and, perhaps, its own inclination in proceeding with circumspection in those states in which the "Anglo-Saxons" have assumed special financial and military responsibilities. During King Hussein's visit, for example, as well as in response to repeated if vague Saudi requests for arms, the Foreign Office has taken special pains to reiterate that the French Government desired to avoid becoming a supplier of military materiel to these states, notwithstanding "symbolic" deliveries of weapons in limited quantities which might occasionally be approved. In reacting to French initiatives (for instance the Amman airport project) we have taken the line that US preoccupations with the economic burdens which given French projects might place on countries such as Jordan are essentially similar to those with which the French are concerned in the African UAMCE states, a fact of which the Quai seems keenly conscious.

As usual, no one knows what may be in General de Gaulle's mind. France's special interest in the Mediterranean, the desire to buttress and expand her "presence" in its basin, her traditional strategic security needs including the requirement to safeguard her communications and trade with Africa, may be expected to influence his thinking now as in the past. Our best current guess is thathe will cause French gestures of friendship and presence to be multiplied, judiciously backed by impact projects here and there (financed with COFACE guaranteed credits if possible) to keep hopes high. The main effort will, however, probably continue for some time to be made in the cultural field using French educators and technicians to prepare a climate suitable for further initiatives when additional means become available as France's economy grows and, perhaps, as her current North African commitments are further reduced.

One cynical but well placed official here has said that the best policy for France's success in the Arab states is to pay them a great deal of attention but to do nothing for them of any substantial importance.

The limited commercial importance of the Arab Middle East to France currentl is indicated by the fact that, although trade between France and the Arab states of the Middle East increased substantially in both directions in 1963 relative to the 1962 levels, French exports to the area still represented only 1 1/2% of total French exports. Imports into France from the Arab Middle East were considerabl more important and represented about 5% ot total French imports. They consisted very largely of petroleum products.

For the Ambassador:

John A. Bovey, Jr.

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First Secretary of Embassy